

Camaraderie after the Corps: A History of the Retired Army Judge Advocate Association

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For every lawyer who decides to make a career of The Judge Advocate General's Corps (JAGC), retirement—from the Regular component, Army Reserve, or National Guard—is inevitable. Retirement does not mean, however, that friendships and associations with other Army lawyers are at an end. On the contrary, the desire of judge advocates to continue to foster camaraderie in retirement resulted in the establishment of the Retired Army Judge Advocate Association (or "RAJA" as it is colloquially known) in 1976. What follows is a short history of RAJA, including the impetus for its creation and some details on its activities over the last 40 years.

In early 1976, the Korean embassy in Washington, D.C. contacted Colonel (COL) (retired) Waldemar "Wally" A. Solf,¹ who was then working as a civilian attorney in the International Affairs Division² at the Office of The Judge Advocate General. As part of a number of events commemorating the 25th anniversary of the start of the Korean War, the government in Seoul was interested in inviting a select group of judge advocates who had served in Korea during the conflict to make a return visit.³

As a result, a small number of judge advocates who had served in Korea in the 1950s received telephone calls from the Korean embassy. Each was asked whether he would be interested in making a trip with his spouse as part of the Korean Service Veterans Revisit Program, and was informed

that it would be an all-expense paid six-day trip. This phone call was followed up by a written invitation signed by the president of the Seoul (South Korea) Bar Association.



Brigadier General Clio E. Straight

In July 1976, a small group of retired Army lawyers and their wives met in Los Angeles and flew to Seoul. Some knew each other from prior tours of duty together while others knew each other only from "JAG Conferences."⁴ Major General Lawrence "Larry" J. Fuller had served as the SJA at Eighth U.S. Army after the Korean War; his wife Mary accompanied him.⁵ Brigadier General Clio "Red" E. Straight (and wife Betty) and Brigadier General Bruce C. Babbitt (and wife Betty) also were in attendance. Straight, who had served as a judge advocate in both World War II and Korea, had retired from the Corps in June 1961.⁶

¹ Waldemar A. Solf (1913-1987) was an expert in the Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC). A 1937 graduate of the University of Chicago's law school, he served as an Artillery officer in France and Germany in World War II before transferring to the Judge Advocate General's Department in 1946. Solf subsequently had a distinguished career as a judge advocate, including service as a military judge in Korea and as the Staff Judge Advocate, Eighth U.S. Army. After retiring in 1968, Wally Solf served as the Chief, International Affairs Division from 1971 to 1977 and then as Special Assistant to The Judge Advocate General (TJAG) from 1977 to 1979. It was Solf who, in 1974, suggested that a Defense Department-level Law of War program be created. Major General George S. Prugh, then serving as TJAG, concurred with this suggestion, and the result was that the Army became the executive agent for all law of war matters in the Defense Department—and Army lawyers were tasked with ensuring that all U.S. military operations complied with LOAC. Solf's 1974 suggestion was the starting point for the emergence of today's Operational Law framework familiar to all judge advocates. From 1975 to 1977, Solf was a Delegate to the Diplomatic Conference on the Reaffirmation and Development of Humanitarian Law in Armed Conflict in Geneva and was heavily involved in the drafting of what became the 1977 Protocols Additional. While the United States did not ratify the Protocols, their impact on the development of LOAC has been immense.

² Today's International and Operational Law Division.

³ JOHN JAY DOUGLASS, A SHORT HISTORY OF RAJA, 1976 TO 2004 (unpublished monograph), at 1-2.

⁴ Today this event is known as the World Wide Continuing Legal Education conference.

⁵ Born in 1914, Lawrence J. Fuller served in World War II and Korea. His last assignment in the Corps was as The Assistant Judge Advocate General (today's Deputy Judge Advocate General). Fuller retired as a major general in 1971 and died in 1998.

⁶ Born in 1904, Clio Edwin Straight graduated from the University of Iowa's law school in 1930 and served in the Corps in World War II. In 1945, he was sent to Europe where he assumed duties as the Deputy Theater Judge Advocate for War Crimes, U.S. Forces European Theater. In this position, he had overall responsibility for the prosecution of German Army personnel for war crimes. When he retired from the Army in June 1961, he was a brigadier general and the Assistant Judge Advocate General for Civil Law. He subsequently joined Champion International Corporation, where he worked as a lawyer until 1972, when he joined the law firm of Frost & Jacobs in Cincinnati, Ohio. Straight retired from the practice of law in 1977. He died in 1991 and is buried in Arlington National Cemetery. U.S.

Babbitt, who had served as an Infantry officer in World War II, had been a judge advocate during the Korea War. While serving in the 2d Infantry Division in the early months of the conflict, then Major (MAJ) Babbitt made history when he became the first (and only) judge advocate to command a rifle battalion; his unit was deployed in defensive positions along the division's main supply route.⁷



Brigadier General Bruce C. Babbitt

The other attendees were no less distinguished. Colonel (retired) Burton “Burt” F. (and Dee) Ellis,⁸ COL (retired)

DEP'T OF ARMY, U.S. ARMY REGISTER VOLUME III, RETIRED LISTS 51 (1968).

⁷ Bruce C. Babbitt (1920-1999) was a remarkable judge advocate by any measure. He was decorated with the Silver Star in World War II and, after completing his law degree in 1947, joined the Corps. In 1952, Babbitt graduated first in his class at the inaugural Advanced Course (today's Graduate Course). He was the SJA, 3d Infantry Division in the 1950s (when the division was stationed in Germany) and later served as SJA, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam. Babbitt was the Assistant Judge Advocate General for Civil Law when he retired in 1973. For more on Babbitt, see JAGCNET, [https://www.jagcnet.army.mil/852736A005BF2E1/0/10421739EA80CE98525749F00561BD7/\\$file/Bruce%20Babbitt%20bio.pdf](https://www.jagcnet.army.mil/852736A005BF2E1/0/10421739EA80CE98525749F00561BD7/$file/Bruce%20Babbitt%20bio.pdf) (last visited April 6, 2015).

⁸ Born in Idaho in 1903, Burton “Burt” French Ellis graduated from the University of Idaho's law school and entered the Corps late in World War II; then Major Ellis graduated from TJAGSA's eight-week 21st Officer Course in March 1945. George P. Forbes, Jr., *The Judge Advocate General's School*, JUDGE ADVOCATE J., Summer 1945, at 60. Ellis is best known as the prosecutor of SS Lieutenant Colonel Jochen Peiper and other SS personnel for war crimes committed during the Battle of the Bulge. This trial, known today as the “Malmedy Massacre,” was one of the most famous trials to come out of World War II. Ellis retired from the regular Army in November 1958. He lived the next 41 years in Merced, California, where he died in 2000 at the age of 97. Ellis left a \$6 million bequest to the University of Idaho's law school; at the time, this was the largest individual gift to the school in its history. Ellis is buried in Arlington National Cemetery. DOUGLASS, *supra* note 3, at 15. For more on the Malmedy Massacre prosecution and Ellis' role in it, see DANNY S. PARKER, *HITLER'S WARRIOR: THE LIFE AND WARS OF SS COLONEL JOCHEN PEIPER* 159-171 (2014).

Howard (and Blanche) Levie,⁹ COL (retired) Leonard “Lenny” (and Ruth) Petkoff,¹⁰ COL (retired) John Jay (and Margaret “Papoose”) Douglass,¹¹ and COL (retired) Thomas “Tom” F. (and Marie) Meagher.

At a breakfast toward the end of this visit to Korea, the Babbitts, Petkoffs, and Douglasses all agreed that this reunion in Korea had been “a great event” and that a group should be formed that “could bring the JAGs together for some kind of annual reunion.”¹² According to COL Douglass, the name of this organization—Retired Army Judge Advocate Association—was born high over the Pacific on the return flight from Seoul to the United States.¹³

Bruce Babbitt, who was now in private practice in Florida, incorporated RAJA in Florida, with retired judge advocate COLs Dave Chase and Tom Oldham¹⁴ as incorporators. John Jay Douglass was the president and Bruce Babbitt was the Secretary-Treasurer.

⁹ Born in 1907, Howard S. Levie graduated from Cornell University's law school in 1930. After service in the Coast Artillery in World War II (mostly in the Pacific), he transferred to the JAG Department in 1946. Levie had a successful career until retiring in 1963 and beginning a second career as a law school professor at St. Louis University. An expert in war crimes and prisoner of war matters, Levie is most famous for having authored the words of the armistice agreement that stopped the fighting in Korea in 1953—the agreement that is in effect today. Levie celebrated his 100th birthday in December 2007, and is the only Army judge advocate to reach the century mark. He died in 2009, at the age of 101. For more on Levie, see Fred L. Borch, *The Cease-Fire on the Korean Peninsula: The Story of the Judge Advocate Who Drafted the Armistice Agreement that Ended the Korean War*, ARMY LAW., Aug. 2013, 1-3.

¹⁰ Born in 1916, Leonard Petkoff graduated from New York University's law school in 1940 and served in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam before retiring from the Corps in 1972. He was the SJA, U.S. Forces, Korea, in the 1950s. After leaving active duty, Petkoff was the Chief Trial Attorney for the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority. He died in Melbourne, Florida in 2008, aged 91 years. He is buried in Arlington National Cemetery. FIND A GRAVE, <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&G Rid=28920156> (last visited April 7, 2015).

¹¹ Born in 1922, John Jay Douglass had a long and distinguished career as an Army officer and judge advocate. He served as an Infantry officer from 1944 to 1946. Then, after graduating from the University of Nebraska's law school in 1952, he returned to active duty as a judge advocate. Douglass subsequently served in Japan and Korea (1953-1954) and Vietnam (1968-1969). His final assignment was as Commandant, The Judge Advocate General's School, in 1970. Colonel Douglass retired from active duty in 1974. JOHN JAY DOUGLASS, *MEMOIRS OF AN ARMY LAWYER* (n.d.).

¹² DOUGLASS, *supra* note 3, at 3.

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ Then Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Oldham served as COL John Jay Douglass' deputy when Douglass was the staff judge advocate, U.S. Army, Vietnam, from 1968 to 1969. Interview with John Jay Douglass, April 7, 2015 (on file with author).



Colonel (retired) John Jay Douglass was the first President of RAJA.

By early 1977, plans were underway for the first RAJA gathering at The Judge Advocate General's School in Charlottesville, Va. With the help of COL Barney L. Brannen, Jr., then serving as Commandant, about 70 retired judge advocates and spouses attended the "first annual RAJA conference" in the summer of 1977.¹⁵

In what has been called a "democratic" decision, the members of RAJA decided that they would invite only one active duty Army lawyer—TJAG—to address their first gathering, but he would be limited to 25 seconds for any remarks he might wish to make at the RAJA banquet held on Saturday evening. Major General Wilton Persons, then serving as TJAG, apparently used only 20 seconds of his allotted time.¹⁶

Since this inaugural event, the sitting TJAG has always been invited to RAJA's annual gathering. He or she continues to be restricted to 25 seconds for any banquet speech. But there is no restriction on how long TJAG may address RAJA at the annual business meeting, and TJAG's remarks generally have followed a "State of the Corps" format. Over the years, the TJAGSA (now TJAGLCS) Commandant also has been invited to attend RAJA, and usually makes brief remarks about the "State of the School (or LCS)." But the members of RAJA still pride themselves on having the shortest possible annual "business meetings," with the goal of accomplishing all business in less than ten minutes.¹⁷

After the 1977 event in Charlottesville, the retired Army lawyers next gathered in San Antonio, Tex. (1978), and San

Francisco, Cal. (1979). By the time RAJA met in Williamsburg, Va., in 1980, the organization had grown to over 200 members and had determined that future meetings would "repeat the geographic pattern of East Coast, Mid-America, and West Coast in subsequent years."¹⁸ As a result, RAJA met in the following locations after Williamsburg: Colorado Springs, Colo. (1981); Monterey, Cal. (1982); Atlanta, Ga. (1983); Louisville, Ky. (1984); Las Vegas, Nev. (1985); Savannah, Ga. (1986); Austin, Tex. (1987); San Diego, Cal. (1988); Newport, R.I. (1989); Pensacola, Fla. (1990); Honolulu, Haw. (1991); Charlottesville, Va. (1992); San Antonio, Tex. (1993); Reno, Nev. (1994); and Charleston, S.C. (1995). At the Charleston gathering, RAJA members elected COL (retired) Jim Mundt as president and COL (retired) Don Pierce as Secretary; Douglass and Babbitt (who had both served 20 years) stepped down from their inaugural leadership positions.¹⁹

In 1996, RAJA met in Colorado Springs and in Palm Springs in 1997. It met in the following locations in succeeding years: Cocoa Beach, Fla. (1998); Kansas City, Mo. (1999); Sacramento, Cal. (2000); Williamsburg, Va. (2001); San Antonio, Tex. (2002); Las Vegas, Nev. (2003); Portsmouth, N.H. (2004); and Columbus, Ga. (2005). At this meeting, COL (ret) Tim Naccarato replaced Jim Mundt as RAJA president; Mundt had served ten years in the position.

The following year, RAJA was in Rapid City, S.D., and then held meetings in the following locations: Scottsdale, Ariz. (2007); Atlanta, Ga. (2008); New Orleans (2009); Indianapolis, Ind. (2010); Charlottesville, Va. (2011); Fort Worth, Tex. (2012); Honolulu, Haw. (2013); and Baltimore, Md. (2014). RAJA is scheduled for Colorado Springs, Colo. in 2015.²⁰

Over the years, RAJA has implemented a number of changes affecting its membership. Initially, Babbitt and Douglass wanted to restrict membership to Regular Army retirees. In 1999, however, recognizing the increased contributions of Reserve judge advocates to the Army and the Corps, RAJA members unanimously passed a motion opening RAJA membership to retired Army Reservist and National Guard judge advocates. The first retired reserve judge advocate to attend a RAJA event was COL (retired) Ernest "Ernie" Auerbach; he was at the 2000 event in Sacramento, Cal. In 2007, RAJA opened membership to the Corps' legal administrator community, too. As with the earlier decision to open RAJA to Army Reserve and National Guard judge advocate retirees, extending

¹⁵ DOUGLASS, *supra*, note 3, at 3.

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ *Id.*, at 10.

¹⁸ *Id.*, 4.

¹⁹ *Id.*, at 10.

²⁰ *Id.*, at 23.

membership to retired judge advocate warrant officers made sense given their contributions to the Corps over the years.



Colonel (Retired) Ernest Auerbach was the first retired Reserve JA to attend RAJA; this photograph was taken of him in Vietnam in 1966.

Today, RAJA has more than 300 members. Any commissioned or warrant officer who has retired from the regular component of the Army, the Army Reserve or the National Guard is eligible for membership. Associate members are widows and widowers of regular members; today there are about 35 members in this “associate member” category.²¹

A final note: In addition to RAJA, there are other organizations for retired members of our Corps. Similar in purpose to RAJA, the Judge Advocate General’s Corps Retired Noncommissioned Officer Association (JAGCRNCOA) began informally in 1999 but did not have its first formal meeting (to draft a constitution and by-laws) until 2003. From the initial 36 “founding members” of JAGCRNCOA, the organization has grown to more than 85 retired regular and reserve non-commissioned officers who served as legal clerks, legal specialists or paralegals in the Corps. It has an annual reunion in various locations throughout the United States.²² Finally, Army officers who served in Vietnam as judge advocates or who soldiered in any capacity in Vietnam but later served in the Corps are eligible to attend the biannual “JAGs in Vietnam” get-

together. The impetus for this reunion of Vietnam veterans came from Chuck Spradling of Anniston, Ala., who served as a judge advocate in Vietnam from 1971-1972. He is assisted in planning the event—which always takes place in northern Virginia—by Major General (retired) William K. Suter and COL (retired) Barry Steinberg. About 75 officers and their spouses attended the last reunion in 2013; the next get together will be in September 2015, in Washington, D.C.²³

More historical information can be found at

The Judge Advocate General’s Corps
Regimental History Website
<https://www.jagcnet.army.mil/8525736A005BE1BE>

*Dedicated to the brave men and women who have served
our Corps with honor, dedication, and distinction.*

²¹ RETIRED ARMY JUDGE ADVOCATES ASSOCIATION, www.rajaassn.com (last visited April 8, 2015).

²² Email from Master Sergeant (retired) Rick Cox, to author (April 7, 2015, 3:01PM) (on file with author).

²³ Email from Major General (retired) William K. Suter, to author (April 7, 2015, 3:52 PM) (on file with author).